# THE BRITISH EMPIRE

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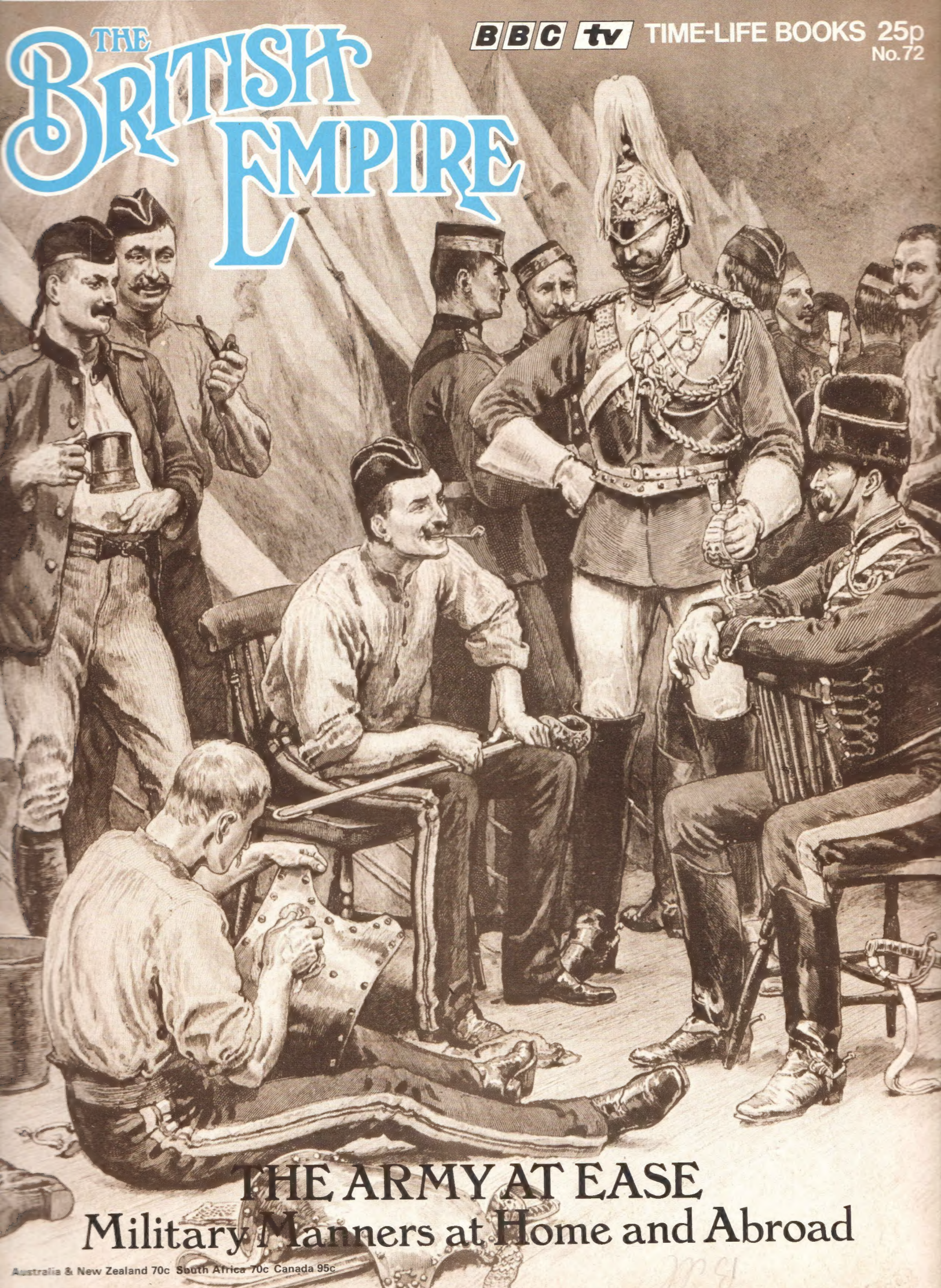

## THE ARMY AT EASE
## Military Manners at Home and Abroad

Australia & New Zealand 70c South Africa 70c Canada 95c

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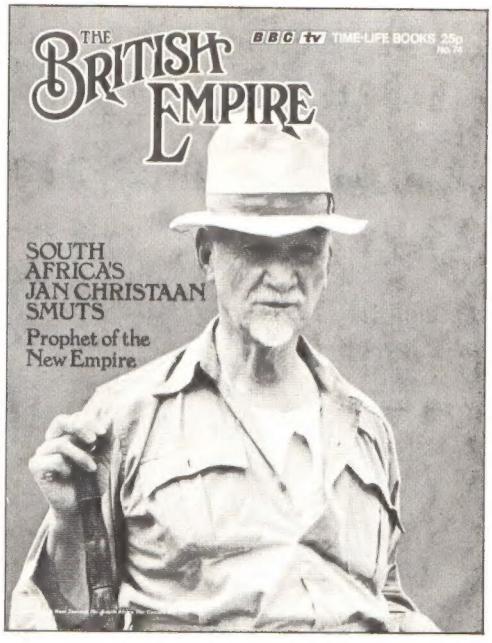


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Army life for officers – whether in Colchester or Cairo – was simply a repetition of the gentlemanly routine on which they had been nurtured as civilians. For other ranks it was hard, dreary – and often brutal.

**2006. Picture Essay: The Royal Tournament**
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**2016. Heroes of the Nation**
Haunted by the spectre of an expansionist Germany and inflamed by the Boer challenge to British supremacy, a jingoistic British public raises the once-despised Tommy to the status of a national hero.


**Cover:** Soldiers appearing in the Royal Tournament of 1892 take time off to relax. The tournament gave an enthusiastic public idealized images of both the British Army and the Empire.

# THE ARMY AT EASE

"The British Army is a social institution prepared for every emergency except that of war," wrote the Secretary of State for War in 1903. The bitter lesson of the Boer War not only had shown up Britain's inability to fight a large-scale compaign but had also revealed the woeful inadequacies of the British military system and those who dominated it.

Fifty years of colonial campaigning had produced the type of officer who could demonstrate his skill and dash only on the polo field or in action against poorly armed natives. It had also produced the type of soldier whose courage and devotion to duty were beyond question, but who was discouraged from exercising his own judgement or initiative and whose life centred on an uninspiring routine of drills and exercises.

Even a spot of active service or a tour of duty in one of the more exotic outposts of Empire made little difference to the manners and attitudes of officers or men. They simply took the life-style of the Army in Britain with them. As one subaltern wrote: "It was hard to imagine anything different from that pageant of fine uniforms, good fellows and good fun."

By William Allan

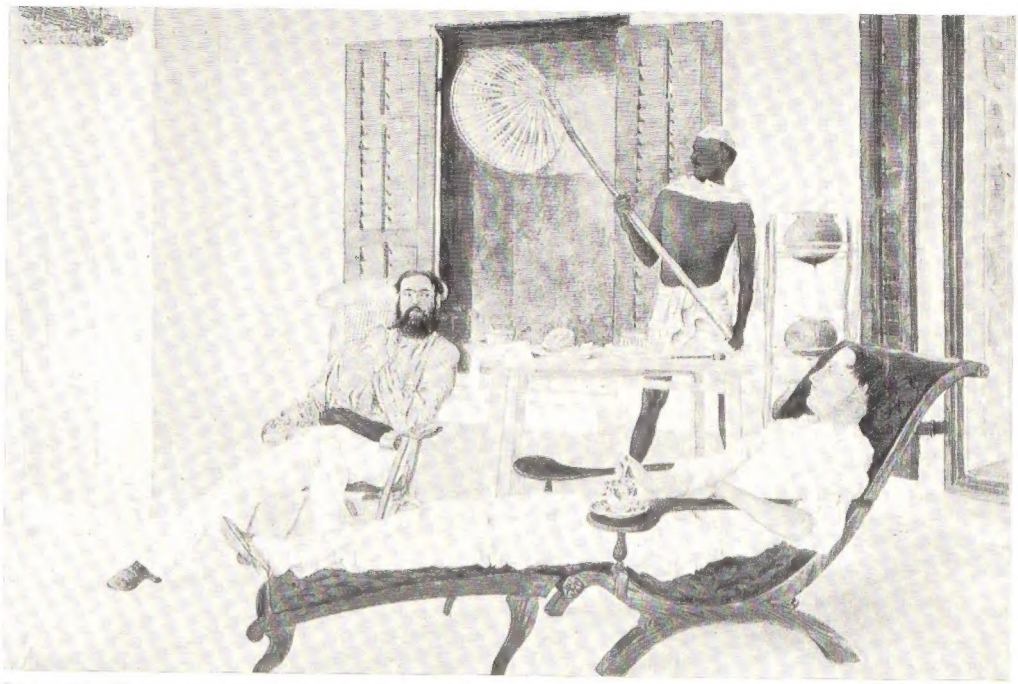
The British Army was the most powerful, colourful and obtrusive institution in the Empire – at peace even more than in war. In Canada, India, Africa and in a multitude of scattered British possessions, officers and soldiers were plainly in view, the guardians and symbols of British paramountcy. To millions of imperial subjects, the scarlet tunic was an object of pride, curiosity, fear or hatred. Those who wore it largely dictated the pace and pattern of social life in the outposts of imperial authority.

Throughout Victoria's reign, Britain fought an epic series of colonial wars, imposing her will across the globe. British justice, British technology and the British brand of Christianity were all exported in lavish quantities. Wherever they went, the Army had to go, too, keeping the peace, subduing hostile neighbours and binding together the sinews of Empire.

Yet most of a soldier's life was spent at peace – a fact often obscured in the historical record by the importance of the Army's fighting role and its deeds of valour. For officers, peacetime soldiering meant little variation from the gentlemanly routine enjoyed by most wealthy civilians. For the ordinary Tommy it meant dreary and fatiguing drills, tough recreational activities and subjection to often ferocious discipline.

The last 30 years of Victoria's reign, however, were an era of change for the British Army, due partly to the development of new weapons, but mostly to the reforming zeal of successive Liberal governments. The reforming process began with Edward Cardwell, Secretary of State for War from 1868 to 1874. Cardwell tried to localize the military system, reorganizing it on a territorial basis and linking line regiments with the volunteer militia regiments. This, he hoped, would stimulate local pride, bring the Army and the nation closer together and encourage regular recruitment from the militia.

Cardwell's reforms also included the reduction of the minimum enlistment period from 21 years to 12, abolition of flogging except in time of war and an increase in privates' pay to a shilling a day, plus free meat and bread. Above all, he abolished the purchase of commissions, a practice which a Royal Commission had condemned more than ten years before as "vicious in principle, repugnant to the public sentiment . . . inconsistent with the honour of the military profession and the policy of the British Empire, and irreconcilable with justice."



**Languid officers gain limited relief from the fierce mid-day heat in this sketch by Arthur Bainbridge, one of a series he produced illustrating the life of an Army officer in India.**

Cardwell's measures brought about a transformation at once radical and superficial. Long-service soldiers, many of whom could count 30 or more years with the colours, had formed the backbone of the disciplined and hardy units that had fought in the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny. Now their place was to be taken by a new type of soldier, younger and better educated, who was supposed to make up in fitness and alertness what he lacked in experience. Similarly, the kind of officer who had made his way by purchase and spent perhaps 20 years in command of his regiment, was to give way to a younger breed brought to prominence by the competitive system.

These changes, however, only *appeared* profound: they sounded well on the lips of Liberal spokesmen and advocates of reform, but the spirit and ethos of the new Army was no different from that of the old. The social preoccupations and attitudes of both officers and men were just the same.

Popularly regarded as little better than drunkards and vagabonds, their brutish instincts kept in bounds only by savage discipline, ordinary soldiers occupied a dubious position in the community. Until the end of the Victorian era, they were forced to live isolated and unsatis-

factory lives, existing on a pittance and disregarded or disliked by the public they were supposed to protect.

On one of the great manœuvres of the 1880s, General Sir Neville Lyttelton, a popular soldier of the Edwardian era, spoke to an old shepherd who told him that he had always gone out of his way to avoid soldiers, for "they are a rough lot, Godless and foul." The shepherd admitted that the last time he had put himself in the way of Redcoats was to watch them marching French prisoners to Dartmoor in 1805.

Given this kind of attitude, it is not surprising that regiments tended to be self-sufficient and the soldiers wary, even contemptuous, of civilians. "The Army will be a mother to you" was an old adage popular with recruiting sergeants, and its frequent use was not entirely cynical.

Many recruits were tempted, then as now, by the prospect of service overseas. There was a chance to see some fighting, the certainty of more exotic sights and relief from the stigma of having "gone to be a soldier." In fact, life in an overseas garrison was even drearier than service at home.

General Lyttelton recalled in his memoirs how bitterly disappointed he was on joining his battalion of the 60th Rifles in Canada in 1869. "We found the battalion at Point Levis on the south bank of the river St. Lawrence opposite the town, engaged in building forts. Nearly their whole time was taken up with this work, the cost of which ran to millions of dollars, every shilling of which was waste. No guns were ever mounted in the forts and no garrisons ever occupied them. The battalion, ten companies strong, looked serviceable enough, but dirty and unkempt, and I was not too favourably impressed with it. Drink was very cheap and was largely consumed and desertion was very prevalent."

The alternative to such fruitless activity was drill, that "farrago of useless and very exceptional combinations." The drill-book of those days was filled with manoeuvres of a complexity and absurdness that defied the efforts of officers and men alike.

But away from the drudgery of garrison life, Canada offered many opportunities to the more enterprising officers. Lyttelton found that "there was always something to do: skating, sleighing and tobogganing in winter; cricket, racquets, fishing, shooting in summer; and boundless hospitality all the year round. There were two good clubs of which most of us availed ourselves, society was very pleasant and manners and customs much less restrained than in England in those days; young men and girls associated together very freely."

**Entitled "Hard work getting through a hot day," this Bainbridge sketch shows officers resorting to novels and old newspapers in an effort to break the boredom and monotony.**

As always, the other ranks had fewer opportunities to take advantage of the local facilities: bad women and worse whisky were the only options usually open to them. While Lyttelton was there, the most the men were allowed to do was experiment, in their own time, with six pairs of ski shoes issued to the battalion. Despite this glaring difference in the quality of their lives, the troops were deeply attached to the regiment and fiercely proud of its achievements, whether military or social.

Lyttelton recalled a conversation he overheard among men of the 4th and 1st battalions of the Rifle Brigade. "The chief test seemed to be the number of officers with handles to their names. Thus a 4th Battalion man said, 'When I was in camp in Point Levis and you was in the citadel at Quebec, we had Lord Cole, Lord 'Amilton, Hon. Vaughn, Hon. Abercromby, Hon. Lawless, Hon. Edwards and Hon. Lyttelton'; to which a 1st battalion man replied with scorn 'Lord Cole, Lord 'Amilton; why in the 1st battalion we had Lord Russell, Lord Cavendish and Lord Cecil long afore you was ever a soldier.'"

Then, as now, the Rifle regiments ranked next to the Guards in social status. Officers of line infantry regiments, who were rumoured to live off their pay, seldom figured in the romantic view of Army life; for the stage, the sensational novelists and, all too frequently, the newspapers, it was the Guards who epitomized the nonchalantly acquired glory of British arms. One of the most colourful characterizations of the languid Guardsman was the Hon. Bertie Cecil in Ouida's novel, *Under Two Flags*.

"A Guardsman at home is always, if anything, rather more luxuriously accommodated than a young Duchess, and Bertie Cecil was never behind his fellows in anything; besides, he was one of the cracks of the Household, and women sent him pretty things enough to fill the Palais Royal. On the softest of sofas,

**Bainbridge depicts the rough-and-ready comforts of an officer's tent in central India. Cramped though it was, room could always be found for the inevitable pet.**

half dressed, and having half an hour before splashed like a water dog out of the bath in the dressing chamber beyond, was the Hon. Bertie himself, second son of Viscount Royallieu, known generally in the Brigade as 'Beauty.' When the smoke cleared away that was circling round him out of a great meerschaum bowl, it showed a face of as much delicacy and brilliancy as a woman's, handsome, thoro'bred, languid, nonchalant, with a certain latent recklessness under the impassive calm of habit."

Characterizations of this kind undermined the efforts of those who were anxious to present a sober, realistic view of the Army, to attract more recruits of good character and to encourage greater trust and confidence in the guardians of Empire. Statesmen like Sir Charles Dilke and writers like G.A.Henty and Herbert Strang insisted that the Army in peacetime should be as familiar to the public as the Army at war. Henty, in his novel – *The Dash for Khartoum* – went to considerable lengths to portray the daily routine of the other ranks.

"The evening was the only time Edgar had to himself; then, if he chose to take the trouble to dress, he could go out into the town or stroll through the camp or take a walk. If disinclined for this there was the cavalry canteen, with a large concert room attached where entertainments were given by music hall singers brought down from London.

"Edgar, who had a healthy appetite, found the food of a very different description from that to which he had been accustomed. Although up at six o'clock in the morning, even in the winter, as it was, there was nothing to eat until eight. Then there was a mug of weak fluid called tea, and an allowance of bread. The dinner, which was at one, consisted of an amount of meat scarcely sufficient for a growing boy. However, when eked out with potatoes and bread it served well enough.

"Edgar found, however, that the Spartan meals could be supplemented by additions purchased in the canteen. Here, pennyworths of butter, cheese, bacon and egg and herring, and many similar luxuries, were obtainable, and two pence of his pay was invariably spent on breakfast, a penny sufficing for the addition of his tea. When once accustomed to his work he found his life an easy and pleasant one; it was like going to a fresh school."

Like school, the Army depended on discipline. Cardwell abolished flogging in peacetime, but extra drill, imprisonment and confinement to barracks remained standard punishments. A commanding officer could award punishment drill for a fortnight, seven days in the cells and 28 days confined to barracks. The most extreme resource was "drumming out," in which the offender was marched down the lines of his battalion by the junior drummer before being thrown out of the barrack gate into the arms of the civilian police. Flogging, regarded by many officers as the linchpin of the disciplinary system, was by far the most brutal sanction. Even after its final disappearance in 1882, officers of the old school shook their heads in disapproval and wondered how discipline could possibly be maintained.

In fact, most disciplinary infractions were of a minor kind – and the majority of these involved drunkenness. One reason for the prevalence of drunkenness was the lack of other forms of entertainment.

General Lyttelton remembered seeing a company commander marching his men through Gravesend in 1870 via every public house in the town. Such sorties often led to drastic and embarrassing repercussions. Lyttelton recalled a similar situation in Gibraltar a few years later, when the Field Officer of the day found an officer drunk on guard. The man's sergeant, a hulking Irishman, "stuck a great dirty thumb down the officer's throat, made him very sick, and got him into a condition of spurious sobriety before real trouble befell him."

When the Camel Corps was formed for the Gordon relief expedition in 1884, 28 regiments were invited to furnish 40 men and two officers each. Most units took the opportunity of sending away their known drunkards: "They'll be all right out there on Nile Water" was the general opinion and Sir Herbert Stewart, commander of the Camel Corps, commented that he hoped his men could go as long without their habitual liquid refreshment as the camels without theirs.

Another widespread and tiresome by-product of life in the officers' mess was practical joking. Some of these jokes could be cruel and destructive, but for the most part they displayed ingenuity rather than malice. In 1878 a mystery figure who went by the name of "Spring-heeled Jack" appeared at Aldershot. This gentleman, later identified as Lieutenant Allfrey of the 60th Rifles, had his boots fitted with powerful springs which enabled him to dash about the countryside in a series of gigantic leaps. His favourite tricks were snatching kisses from courting couples, jumping over challenging sentries and, on one desperate occasion, leaping over the Basingstoke Canal.

One theme common to all the memoirs of this era is the great length of leave allowed to officers and the ease with which they could arrange to stay away from their units for long periods. Colonel Frederick Burnaby, that most renowned of Victorian explorers and daredevils, made several long journeys while on leave from his regiment. At the end of a particularly exhausting trip to Khartoum, Burnaby was lying in his tent when he noticed a paragraph in the weeks-old newspaper at his side, stating that the Russian government had issued an order forbidding foreigners to travel in Russian Asia. Burnaby at once decided to go there, an impulse which led to a famous ride to Khiva. His regimental duties scarcely entered into his considerations.

Nor did they for Captain Philip Salusbury of the Cheshire Regiment: "On Saturday 19th August, 1876," he wrote, "an idea entered my head that having nothing particular to do, I might gain some experience of real warfare if I were to go to Serbia and join the forces there assembled against the Turks." Salusbury obtained indefinite leave of absence from his colonel, packed a portmanteau "containing two pairs of everything" and Murray's *Guide to Southern Germany* and set off the following day!

Captain Salusbury went to see the Serbian War Minister after his arrival in Belgrade, and was promptly offered a command: "I told him," Salusbury recalled, "that I did not care two straws whether I was a colonel or a subaltern in such a rabble." During the battle of Deligrad, Salusbury was surprised to hear the sound of "hearty laughter" from behind a neighbouring hedge, "which roars I knew could only come from the throats of Englishmen. I called out 'Are you English?' and in a couple of seconds two young Englishmen were through the hedge and shaking hands with me. We all three returned to camp . . . where we smoked our pipes and had a talk about the old country." The hapless Serbs were left to fight their battle without the benefit of British "expertise."

# WORK, SPORT AND PLAY

Lord Wolseley, who was one of the few senior military figures to recognize the urgent need for a modern, well-trained fighting force, once declared that the Army would be unable in the event of war even to guarantee the safety of London. His criticisms only served to enrage the aged Commander-in-Chief, Field-Marshal the Duke of Cambridge. For 40 years the Duke "not only opposed change, but quarrelled with those who proposed it."

Away from active service, Army life was often a pointless round of training exercises, inspections and drills. The officers spent their leisure hours hunting, shooting and playing polo, while the other ranks got up football or cricket matches, took part in regimental competitions or tried to make the best of the reading-room. The routine was much the same in Colchester and Cairo, Aldershot and Delhi; unvarying, monotonous – and totally ineffectual.

Troops prepare to launch an observation balloon at the Aldershot manoeuvres of 1907.

Artillerymen manoeuvre a heavy gun across a makeshift bridge during a demonstration at Woolwich Arsenal in the summer of 1865.

# Building Bridges to Hell

Throughout the 19th Century the British Army fought most of its wars against an elusive enemy in lands where roads were inadequate and natural obstacles a constant hazard. Mobility and what was loosely termed "fieldcraft" were therefore of great importance in training. Bridge-building, river-crossing and ways of transporting equipment became a regular exercise for all branches of the service. "Whenever you are travelling about the country," urged one Adjutant-General, "mark the rivers and streams, the valleys and approaches to towns. Think how you would bring a brigade or even a single battery into action across that stretch of ground." Bridging was an exercise familiar to anyone who had served in India. "We'd build a bridge to Hell," wrote one veteran, "if we weren't there already."

Cadets at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst show how to cross a river by raft in 1881.

**Soldiers demonstrate the strength of a timber-and-rope bridge, erected in training for campaigns in India and Africa.**

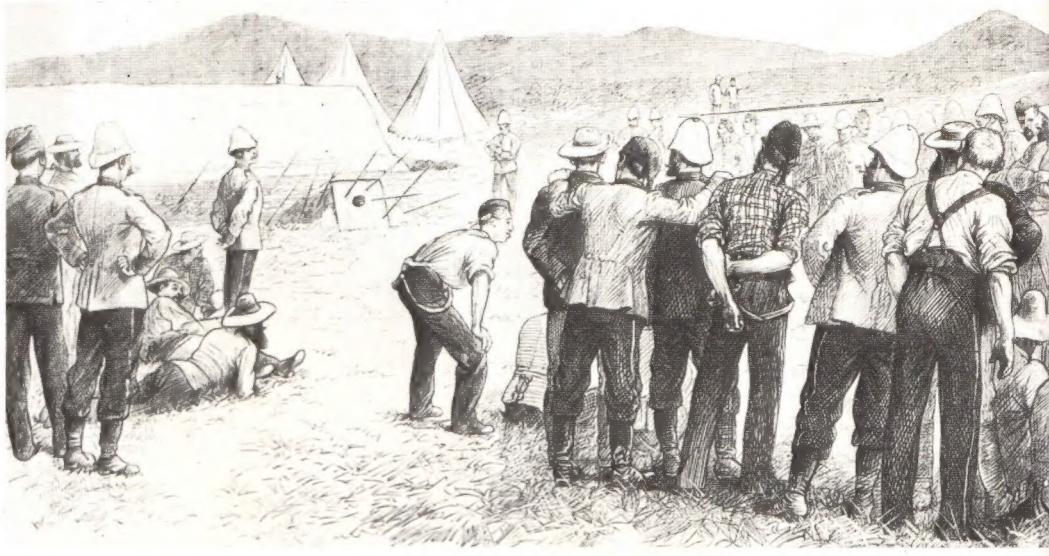
# Fun With a Purpose

Competitions were supposed to keep the men "keen as mustard and as fit as fiddles." Whether mounted by regiments, companies or sections, displays of skill and endurance were regarded as light-hearted ways of reinforcing group loyalties. It was a poor show if the regiment lost the egg-and-spoon race and "dire humiliation" if the corporal's nanny-goat was beaten by some Navy mongrel in the Pets' Handicap.

Africans and Indians alike took to these strange but enjoyable rites with tremendous gusto. It was undoubtedly baffling to jump about in a sack or hop to the cookhouse on one leg: it was also undeniably fun.

Officers naturally had far less to do with sports of this kind: obstacle races were thought to be too vulgar, sweaty and hazardous. Officers were expected instead to acquire their "grit and go" from the more gentlemanly pursuits of polo and field sports.

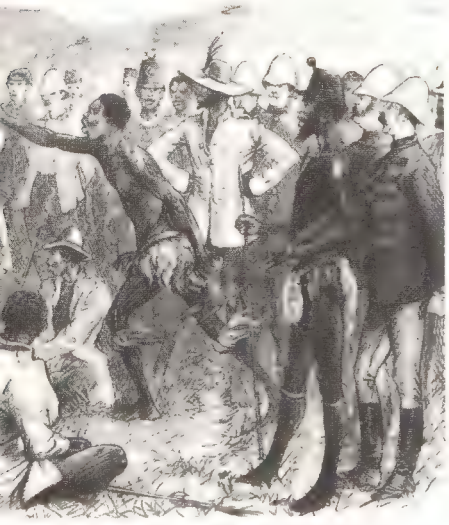
This contrast between the sporting activities of officers and men was less marked in the Volunteer forces, where all ranks knew each other from civilian life. Nor was there the same competitive urgency about sporting fixtures.



**Assegai-throwing features in a sports display organized by British troops and Zulu levies in 1879**

**Crawling through a sail at speed was supposed to provide amusement and boost morale.**

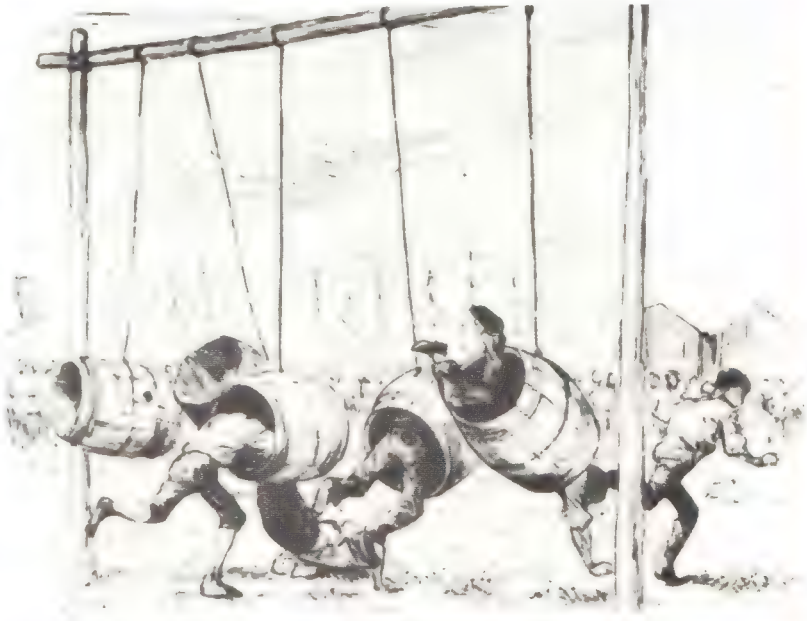
**Sunshine and slumber were the chief attractions for these Yeomanry officers attending a military display in the 1890s.**



to celebrate Queen Victoria's birthday.

Competitors in the Singapore menagerie race of 1881 urge on their charges to little avail.

Some scenes from the Army athletics competition of 1877.



Climbing through casks was a tough stage in the obstacle race.

A sack race organized for the Zulu levies during the Queen's birthday festivities in 1879 proves a bewildering experience for the uninitiated.

Soldiers jostle at polo. The sport was brought to Britain in 1872.

A 17th Lancers officer of 1891 prepares for action.

This group portrait shows the Essex Regiment polo team.

The Burma Cup was one of the Army's most coveted polo trophies.

The tug-of-war demanded plenty of team spirit, but it also led to lasting and sometimes bitter regimental rivalries.

# Gentlemen and Players

Polo and fox-hunting were an integral part of an officer's life. Both sports were thought to foster "the habit of quick decision combined with calm judgement in critical situations." But by the end of the 19th Century some senior cavalry officers were anxious lest the habit of playing polo should lead the younger generation of officers to ignore the benefits of hunting. Field-Marshal Sir Evelyn Wood reckoned fox-hunting to be the best possible training for a cavalryman and believed that polo, although "a most finished form of equitation," did not begin to match it.

By contrast, the sports of other ranks encouraged intense team spirit or dogged self-reliance: into these categories came football, boxing, athletics and the ever-popular tug-of-war. Fencing, archery and other traditional "gentleman's sports" were also encouraged on the grounds that quickness of eye and speed of reflex were vital in a time of accurate and rapid shooting and fast movement on the battlefield.

The increasingly powerful German Army also came to believe firmly in the value of competitive sports. "They influence the spirit of the soldier," wrote Kaiser Wilhelm with evident approval, "and strengthen the power of the will, the determination and ambition."

Fencing was one of the gentlemanly sports encouraged among other ranks because it developed suppleness, balance and a quick eye.

# Pride of the Indian Army

The mule-packed mountain gun came to epitomize the Indian Army quite as much as the more romantic figure of the Bengal Lancer. In the early days of British campaigning on the wild North-West Frontier, troops were often handicapped by the weight and clumsiness of their field-artillery. Time after time the enemy was able to disperse before the field-guns could be dragged into position.

The answer to the problem was the mountain gun. Weighing 418 pounds, the 10-pounder gun could, as the movements on this page show, be rapidly dismantled and packed on two mules ready for transportation. Always travelling close to the columns it protected, it could be set up with equal rapidity and, with its range of 6,000 yards, enabled the Army to balance fire-power and mobility in difficult terrain.

It particularly proved its worth in Afghanistan. In the First Afghan War of 1842, the marauding Afghans had captured guns at will and destroyed a whole British army. In the Second Afghan War, in 1879, the new guns enabled General Roberts to scatter his attackers as they formed up and thus keep his main force safely on the move.

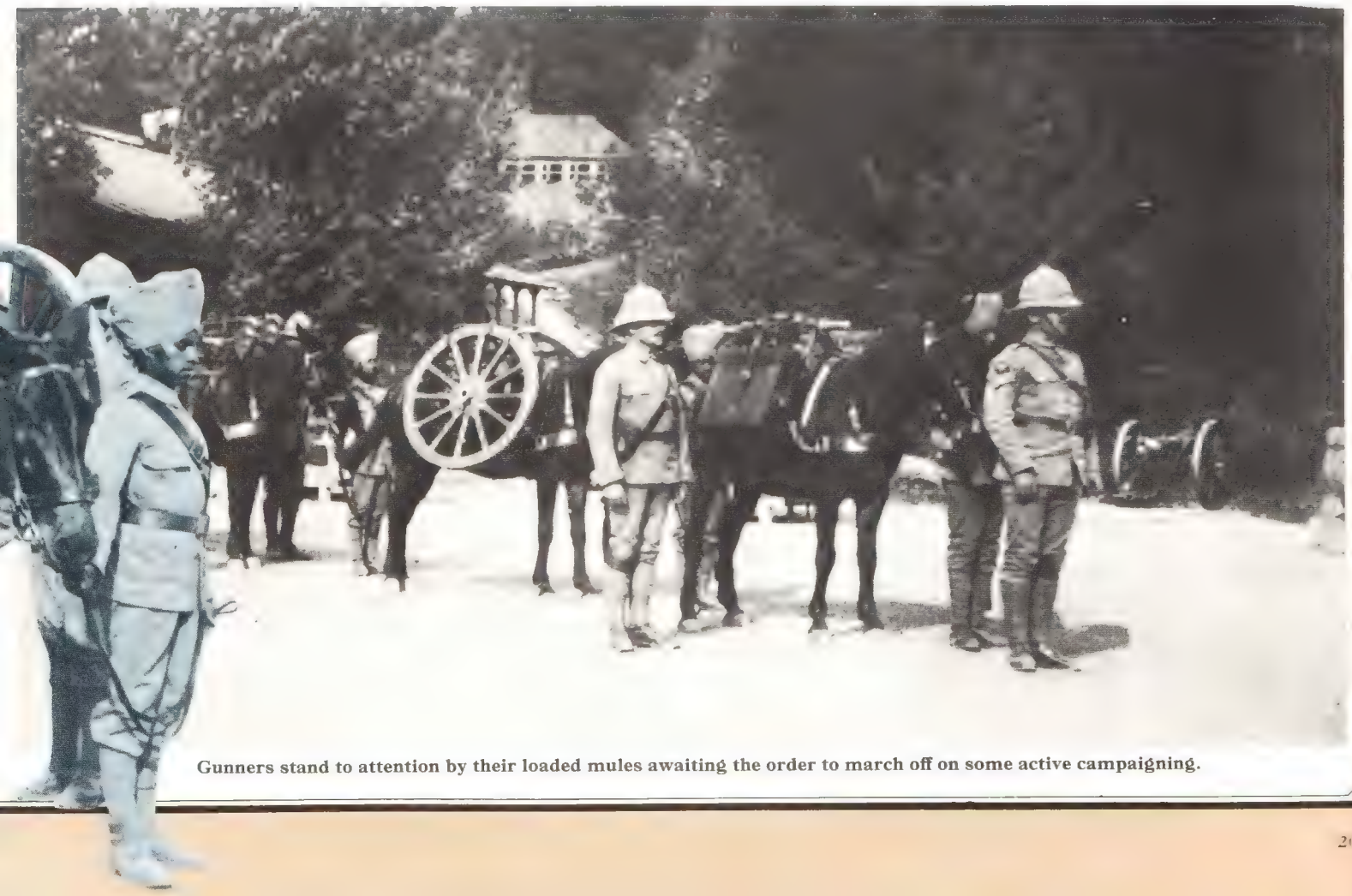
**A mountain gun is dismantled before being loaded on to its special mule carriage.**

**The bulky gun-trail has to be correctly balanced and secured on top of the load.**

**Securing a gun-axle to the mule harness calls for a firm hand and a steady eye.**

The gun-barrel has to be unscrewed before the loading operation can begin.

Gunners "break" a gun-axle before lifting the wheels on to the mule cradle.



Gunners stand to attention by their loaded mules awaiting the order to march off on some active campaigning.

# The Desert Hussars

One unit that needed a highly individual course of training was the Camel Corps. Never popular, it took recruits, unwillingly drafted from a variety of different regiments, weeks to master their evil-tempered mounts with the moves (right) specified by the Army manual.

Camels were used to meet the rigorous conditions of Egypt, the Sudan and the remoter parts of India and where horses were not capable of covering long distances over loose sand on the scanty feed and water afforded by the deserts.

Colonel Maxwell's Camel Corps, made up of men from the Rifle Brigade and the 88th Regiment, fought with great distinction in the Indian Mutiny.

Camels also played a successful role in Abyssinia in 1869, but the Camel Corps as such was not re-created until the Egyptian War of 1882. Sometimes called the "Desert Hussars," the Corps, equipped with carbine, bayonet and "a white sunshade not less than three feet in diameter," operated as mounted infantry, crossing the desert at a speed impossible for other arms and seizing wells or towns vital for the Army's supplies and communications.

**"Standing to attention with camel."**

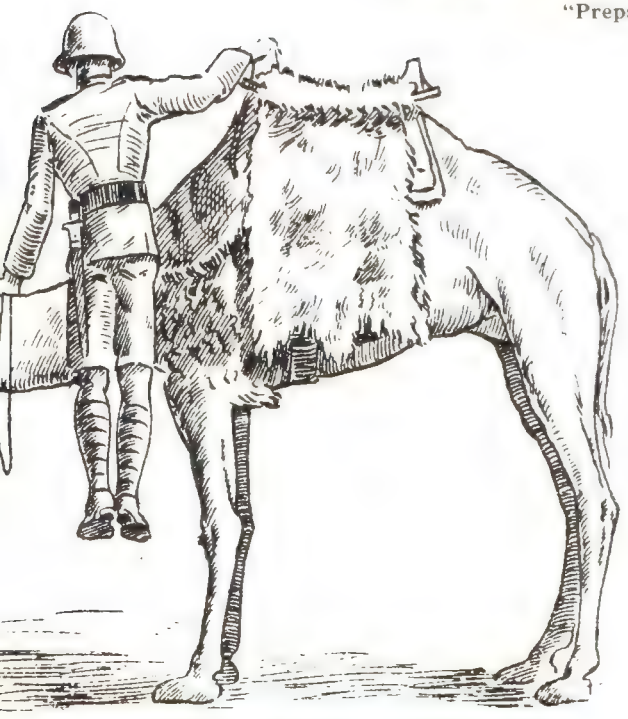
**"Prepare to mount: first position."**

**Two members of the Camel Corps demonstrate the correct posture for standing to attention beside their mounts.**

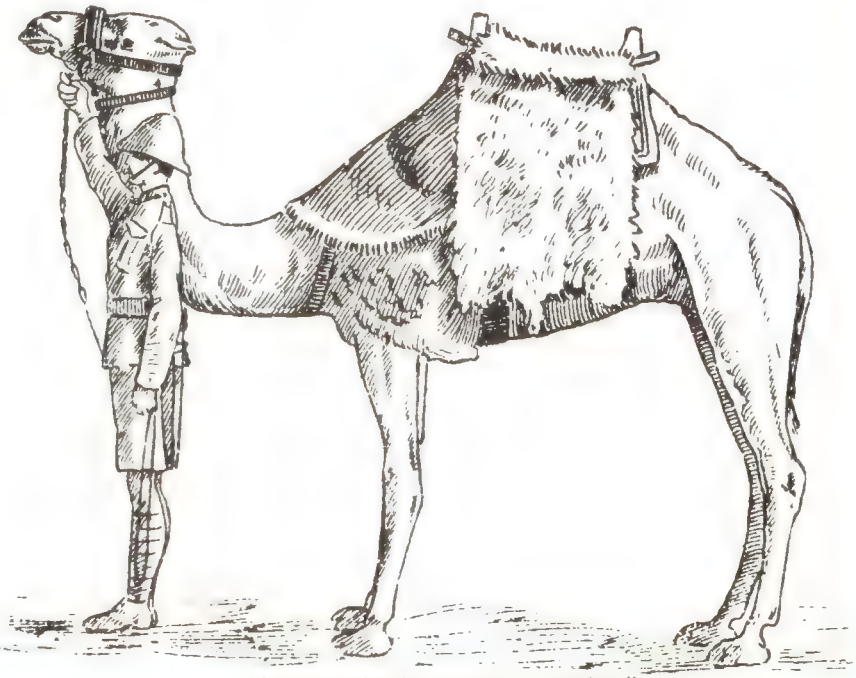
"Prepare to mount: second position."

"Prepare to mount: third position."

"Prepare to mount: final position."



"Dismounting from a standing camel."

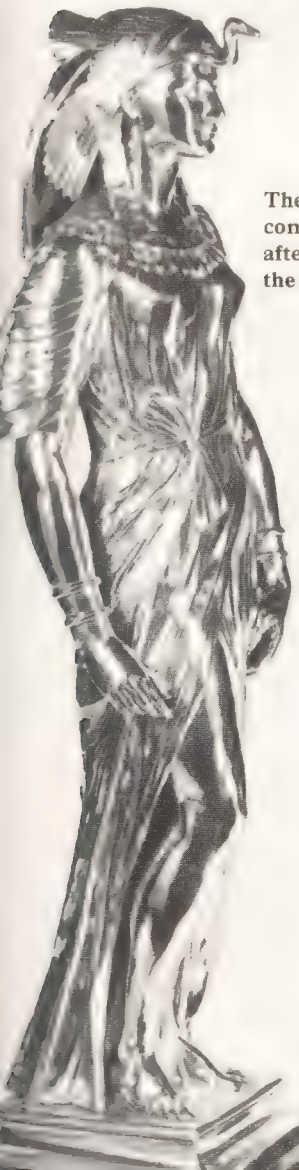


"Camel and rider come to attention."

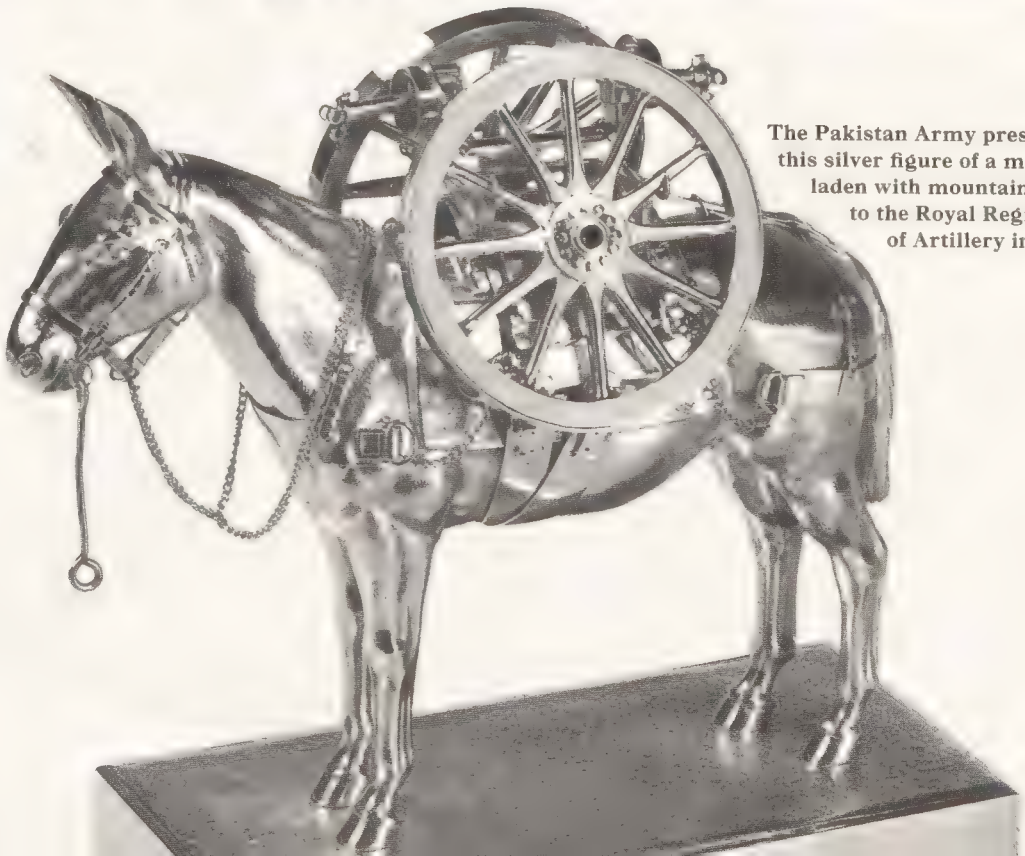
# REGIMENTAL TREASURES

The officer's mess and its ante-rooms still provide the setting for the most elegant and dignified scenes of regimental activity. Guest nights, with their gently flickering candles, gleaming displays of silver and the distant strains of a military band, have always been the social highlights of life in the British Army.

Reflecting the glories of past battles and campaigns would be the regimental silver, presented by outgoing colonels, honorary members of the regiment or visiting royalty. Favourite chargers would glow by the side of decorative figures dressed in the uniforms worn at Quebec and Waterloo, and scale models of the biggest tigers "bagged" in India would be lined up with prized objects seized from the baggage of King Joseph Bonaparte and priceless ornaments looted from the palaces of Indian princes or Chinese emperors. Together they represented the history and traditions of the regiment and were a spur to further glories and achievements.



**The silver figure of Cleopatra was commissioned by the Royal Engineers after their return to England from the Egyptian campaign of 1882.**

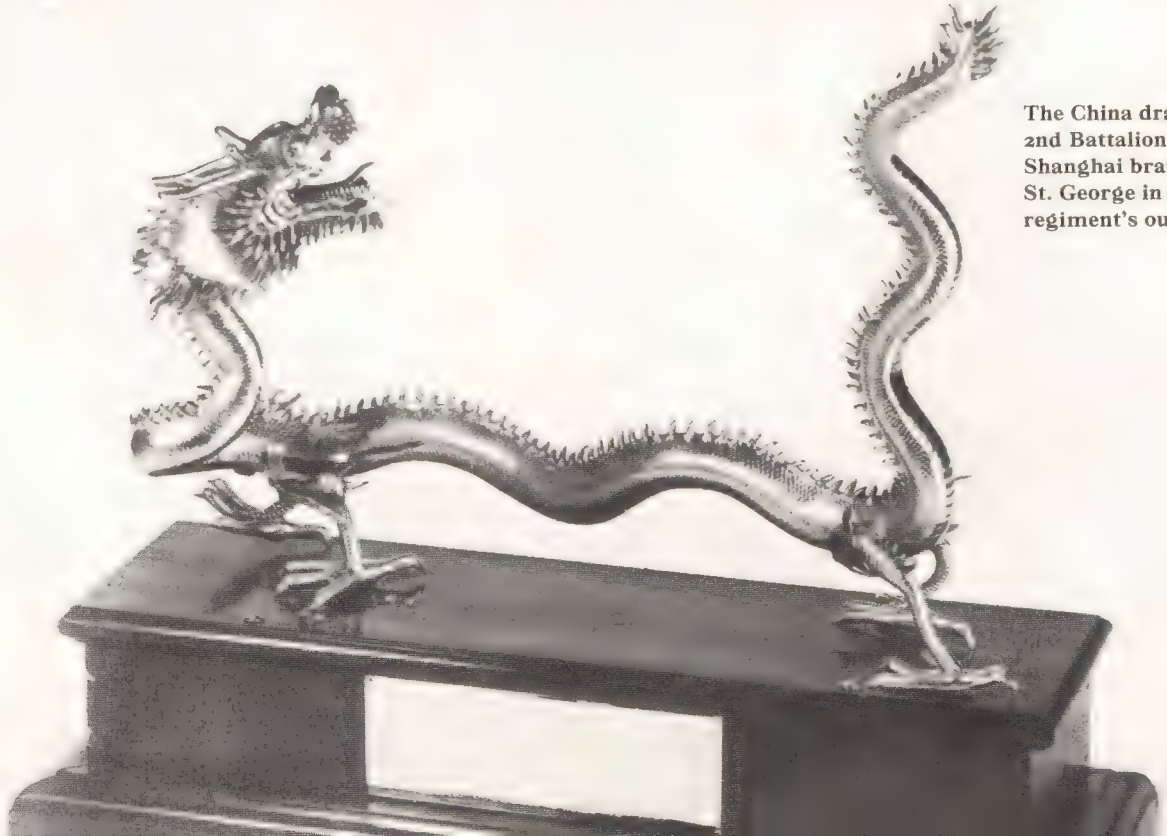


**The Pakistan Army presented this silver figure of a mule laden with mountain gun to the Royal Regiment of Artillery in 1947.**

This elephant of silver (left) in full ceremonial trappings was commissioned by officers of the 17th Lancers to mark their service in India between 1879 and 1890.

Perfect in every detail, this silver statuette of a Grenadier Guardsman wearing full-dress uniform was modelled for the regiment in 1889.

This figure of an officer in the Jaipur Horse was given to the Life Guards by the Maharaja.



The China dragon was presented to t
2nd Battalion the Green Howards by
Shanghai branch of the Royal Society
St. George in 1929 in appreciation of
regiment's outstanding services.

# THE ROYAL TOURNAMENT

"Britannia's Muster at the Royal Naval and Military Tournament is no mere pageant," stated the 1910 programme of events. "It is the militant spirit of our Empire translated into flesh and blood. It is the living story of the thousand battles by sea and land which have given Britannia her outposts."

This fanfare for Empire was a far cry from the aims of those who organized the first "assault at arms" in the Agricultural Hall, Islington, in June, 1880. Their only concern was the apparent decline of public interest in Army affairs and the poor weapon-training of the troops.

The concept of a military display as a form of public entertainment was new to Britain, but it was hoped that such an event would be both profitable and useful. The early tournaments were neither: they lost money and evoked little enthusiasm, for the "drunkards, bullies and cads" who were thought to make up the armed forces. But gradually military success in imperial campaigns stimulated popular admiration for the Army and by the mid-1880s the Royal Tournament was firmly established as a popular feature of the London summer. It has remained so ever since.

Watched by hundreds of eager spectators, massed bands and ranks

of marching soldiers dressed in every colour and variety of uniform bring the Royal Tournament of 1899 to its stirring and magnificent climax.

The musical drive by the King's Troop, Royal Horse Artillery, was one of the highlights of the early tournaments and still remains so.

A reconstruction of an incident in the Boer War (right), presented in 1925, shows artillerymen bringing up a gun with a span of oxen.

A member of the 5th Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards matches his speed and horsemanship at the 1938 Royal Tournament against an entrenched machine-gun position.

## Keeping the Public Happy

In the early days of the Royal Tournament the organizers felt some anxiety lest the ordinary drills and displays should not be dramatic enough to keep the public entertained. The Roman circus masters, as critics of the tournament pointed out, had expressed much the same fear.

As a result, some of the stunts and tricks introduced for added effect were too dangerous. After witnessing one particularly daring display of battery horses jumping over kneeling soldiers, Field-Marshal Sir Evelyn Wood felt obliged to write a letter of protest to the Adjutant-General: "I deprecate any such performance; it's unfair on the men and the training is very bad for the horse." Thereafter, such stunts became the sole prerogative of a small and specially trained group of regular participants.

But the assessment of the early organizers was correct. Martial music, historical tableaux and daredevil displays of physical skill have remained the cornerstones of the Royal Tournament programme.

The display of tent-pegging by the Bengal Lancers stole the show at the tournament of 1902.

A mock attack by an armoured train was a fascinating novelty at the tournament of 1887.

# Shoulder to Shoulder

Special features of the Royal Tournament programmes at the beginning of the century were historical reconstructions or "pageants." The first of these was presented by the Buffs and the 3rd Hussars in 1895. Troops paraded in all the different uniforms of their respective regiments since their formation. The public responded with great enthusiasm and similar spectacles depicting the "Warriors of Britain" appeared at many subsequent tournaments.

"Warriors of Empire" also figured prominently in the Jubilee tournament of 1897. They won widespread acclaim and the tournament organizers decided to include colonial units as separate items in future. One exception was the Indian Army, which was not represented until 1902, when men of the Bengal Lancers thrilled audiences with a daring display of tent-pegging, pig-sticking and fancy lance work of all kinds. Such a performance, declared the tournament programme, was clear evidence of the Lancers' "loyalty, valour and devotion."

In its early days the Royal Tournament had a mainly military flavour. The Royal Navy was not formally associated with it until 1905 – the centenary of Trafalgar. But Naval detachments often featured in the displays. In 1898, for example, units of both services staged a combined display entitled "Shoulder to Shoulder," illustrating the history of co-operation between Army and Navy from Drake's siege of Cadiz to the recent campaign in Egypt.

"Rescuing the Trumpeter" was one of the heroic

A mountain battery demonstrates to the public its skill at crossing a stream by pontoon bridge.

episodes staged to thrill onlookers in 1892.

This contemporary sketch of the soldiers' gallery at the tournament of 1902 shows N.C.O.s taking a lively interest.

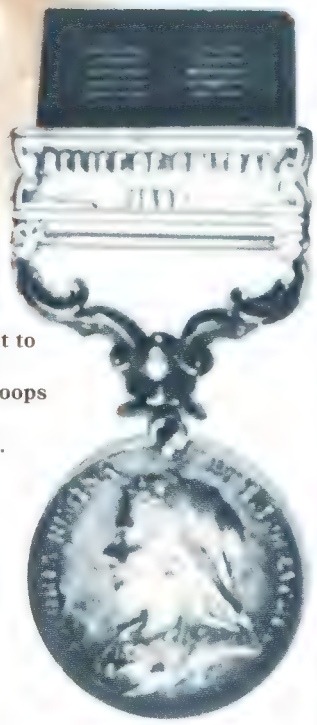
The climax of the 1894 tournament was this enactment of a scene from the Sudan War in which Tommies beat off a desperate

attack by Dervish hordes. The combined display of all arms was invariably a re-enactment of a set-piece imperial battle.

# THEY ALSO SERVED

The British have always had a reputation for being fond of animals to the point of eccentricity and the armed services are no exception. Regimental histories and Naval records abound with stories of mascots and pets who underwent the ordeal of battle and shared the sufferings of the men.

In the days of long service, both soldiers and sailors went to great pains to import some sense of domestic life into the grim surroundings of barracks or ship-of-war. For practical as well as sentimental reasons, dogs or cats were an obvious choice. They killed rats and kept down mice as well as providing comic relief and a focal point for the affections of the men. Some of the dogs, such as Bobbie of the Berkshires, were formally adopted into the regiment, sharing its anguish and its battle honours and wearing its medals. They are the heroes – or heroines – of innumerable legends, whether concerning Prince Rupert's noble staghound or the humble East End mongrels who helped to locate wounded civilians during the Blitz.



Biddy (above) accompanied the force sent to restore order in Chitral and the Tirah in 1894. Her enduring popularity with the troops was rewarded by the presentation of the General Service Medal with clasp (right).

Pip, the garrison mascot at Rorke's Drift during the Zulu onslaught in 1879, won the admiration and affection of the British troops by growling fiercely as the Zulus closed in warily round the mission station and, during the battle, by drawing attention to the wounded.

Tommy, the Lancashire pigeon, made an epic flight to Holland in 1942 which enabled Dutch Intelligence to send back vital information to Britain, and won for him the Dickin Medal (left), the animals' V.C.

Judy was a Royal Navy mascot who fell into the hands of the Japanese during the Second World War. She helped to maintain morale among British prisoners.

Simon was the ship's cat on board H.M.S. *Amethyst* when she ran the gauntlet of Chinese shore batteries in 1947.

Bobbie was with the Berkshires at the Battle of Maiwand during the Afghan War of 1879–1880. Most of the regiment was wiped out, but their mascot survived to receive the Afghan Medal from Queen Victoria herself.

# II. Heroes of the Nation

Taking part in other people's wars was an expensive and dangerous way of acquiring experience: most officers used their long periods of leave for sporting rather than military excitement. Hunting was the invariable activity for officers of every branch of the service, of all ranks, in all stations. Whether in central India, Gibraltar, Cape Colony or Aldershot, "riding to hounds" was one of the few social imperatives.

When General Sir John Adye first joined C Battery, Royal Horse Artillery, at Aldershot in 1885, he made the mistake of asking his commanding officer for leave to go hunting – the man was shocked beyond measure, and told Adye that "as long as there is one subaltern left in barracks to do the work on a hunting day, I don't want you to ask for leave: always go." While he was at the Staff College, Adye and his fellow students were able to hunt six days out of seven.

Fox-hunting became such a sacred rite in the Army that, when a *Times* correspondent pointed out the frivolity of such activities, no less a figure than the Adjutant-General, Field-Marshal Sir Evelyn Wood, intervened to defend the rite: "Hunting," he wrote, "is one means of acquiring, when leading troops, the habit of quick decision combined with calm judgement in critical situations."

Wood developed his theme in an address entitled *Hunting as Military Training*. All Britain's modern military heroes, he pointed out, had been keen huntsmen, from the Duke of Wellington to Sir John French, Commander-in-Chief of the B.E.F. in 1914. "While I do not assert that Sir David Beatty and Sir John Jellicoe won the battles of Heligoland and the Jutland Bank by their practice of fox hunting," Wood wrote, "it may interest objectors to hunting . . . to learn that the Vice-Admiral is said to ride brilliantly to hounds, and that as late as the season of 1913–14, I saw the Admiral riding well in front following the Essex pack." In other words, the Battle of Jutland was indeed won on the hunting fields of England.

This instinct to play down the "professional" aspect of Army life was not confined to ordinary regimental soldiering. The conduct of the War Office itself was a sufficiently leisurely business, except when the Army Estimates had to be debated in Cabinet and Parliament. When Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman became Secretary for War in 1892, he attended only two days at the War Office before setting out for Marienbad, Zurich and Paris.

He returned to London for a cabinet meeting and then retired to his Scottish home for all of October. He spent three weeks in London in November, but did not return to his office until the following January. Campbell-Bannerman was one of the most competent and conscientious ministers of his day; but he understood perfectly the workings of his department and believed it his business to do no more than keep himself and the Army out of trouble and reduce the estimates. "The best reforming system," he wrote, "is to leave well alone."

The question that bedevilled every senior official of the armed forces was that of the postings and appointments. Naturally, any officer worth the name was anxious to see some fighting; the great problem for them was how to get to the scene of action from a regiment based in Dublin or Canterbury.

Wives and mothers vied with each other in pressing the services of their dashing husbands and sons, and the War Office frequently looked like "the scene of a gold rush" so fierce was the competition for places. In the event of war, and the news that an expeditionary force was to be sent, the Commander-in-Chief-designate lived in a state of perpetual siege until all the appointments were announced. It was a very polished and polite siege, conducted on both sides with diffident good manners, but it was unmistakably a siege. Even if no war threatened, there was keen competition for postings to the more desirable ports of the Empire, sometimes for the sake of health, more often in the interests of sport.

India was – for those who had never been – a particular attraction, for it was the sporting arena *par excellence*. Apart from fox-hunting, racing and cricket, there was salmon-fishing and bear-shooting in Kashmir, and big-game hunting in central India and the foothills of the Himalayas. The reality, however, was often cruelly disappointing. The only difference between barrack life in India and at home was that "the whores were black outside as well as in, and there's a more than evens chance you'll perish of putrid fever or an Afghan bullet."

In general, service in the Mediterranean or South Africa was regarded as the pleasantest change from home, although the resources of the Mediterranean were scarcely adequate as a training-ground. Gibraltar was much the favourite posting. The eternal dust, winds and glare of Malta made it very unpopular with anybody who had to spend longer than a week on the island. In winter, the dances, picnics, riding and driving parties were a poor match for the hunting and racing afforded by Gibraltar.

One of the major institutions on "the Rock" was the Calpe Hunt, which hunted into Spain, by courtesy of the Spanish landowners round the border. In addition, the more venturesome officers used to cross to Morocco for deer-hunting or take boat trips down the rocky Spanish coastline. Accounts of life in Gibraltar by officers who served there give the impression of life in a county town, punctilious, petty, full of social grievances and worries, and with little to do but hunt, flirt and read.

Life for the other ranks – and for the more conscientious officers – was irksome and professionally useless. The area was not large enough to allow for ambitious exercises, and most of the soldiering consisted of drills and displays for the visiting Spanish governor of La Linea. The only real advantage was the profit to be made from tobacco smuggling. This activity was conducted on a grand scale, from the local fishermen to the Spanish officials via the humbler ranks of the British Army.

But attitudes were now changing back home. As Victoria's reign drew to its close, a new mood of aggressive and militant chauvinism began to seize the British nation. Fed by fears of German expansionism and lurid stories of Boer brutality served up by the popular Press, the public looked with new eyes upon the once ignored or despised British Tommy. Underpaid, ill-used and often badly led, he at least had the compensation of being a focus for the patriotic fervour and affection of his fellow-countrymen.

*Officer, 60th or The King's Royal Rifle Corps, 1832*